

The Other Divide

Synchronizing the work of district curriculum and technology leaders can facilitate more effective digital learning.

\\ BY ANN WARE

The digital revolution is changing how many U.S. school districts create engaging learning environments, with collaboration between the curriculum and technology departments slowly becoming the norm rather than the exception. By developing a common language around how students learn best, these leaders are fostering a shared vision for effective 21st century learning.

Unfortunately, there remains a palpable gap between this vision and the day-to-day strategic work these leaders are doing. Historically, technology leaders have focused more on technical work that includes

data centers, wired and wireless environments for data, packet shaping and enterprise e-mail solutions. Meanwhile, their curriculum colleagues often have been caught in the status quo, potentially discounting the important role digital technologies should play in preparing students for their knowledge-based future.

Barriers that prevent effective collaboration between these departments include the hectic day-to-day pace at which district leaders work; a failure to recognize each department's contributions to student success; a "silo" mentality in which each department focuses only on getting "its own" work done; and the absence of a common language

around effective research-based teaching and learning strategies and how appropriate technology tools can enable them.

Connecting the Dots

At the national, state and local levels, there is increasing recognition of the need for collaborative leadership, vision and policies that effectively bring learning environments into the digital age. Last fall, for example, leaders from the Georgia Association of Curriculum and Instructional Supervisors and the Georgia K12 CTO Council met via video conference to discuss challenges and successes in building engaging 21st century learning environments. They agreed on several key points, including the need to better understand each other's role in the educational process; the importance of participating in joint "walk-throughs" to observe engagement and existing barriers; the value of including technology leaders in curriculum development

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Instructional Practice	21st Century Learning Tools
Identifying Similarities and Differences	Electronic mind maps help students represent similarities and differences in graphic or symbolic form, which enhances their understanding of and ability to use knowledge.
Summarizing and Note-taking	Word processors and/or moderated wikis allow students to effectively summarize by deleting, substituting and doing other editing to arrive at essential information.
Generating and Testing Hypotheses	Simulated online science labs make it easier to perform a variety of experiments — including those involving dangerous substances or things too small or distant to observe in real life — and allow students to practice generating, testing, and explaining their hypotheses and resulting conclusions.
Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback	Social media tools let students provide and receive frequent feedback to and from their peers and teacher, specific to an identified target of knowledge or skill.

Recommended Reading

The following literature can serve as a starting point for district leaders who want to synchronize their work and foster a common language about how to best utilize technology tools in support of evidence-based practices.

- *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* by Robert J. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering and Jane E. Pollock (2001)
- *What Works in Schools: Translating Research Into Action* by Robert J. Marzano (2003)
- *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* by John Hattie (2008)
- *Teaching and Assessing 21st Century Skills: The Classroom Strategies Series* by Robert J. Marzano and Tammy Heflebower (2011)



Check out key indicators of the need for change in teaching and learning approaches at edtechmag.com/k12/indicators112.

and curriculum leaders in tech planning; and the significance of a joint curriculum and technology collaboration in the budgeting process to ensure that everyone is able to do more with less.

The bottom line, they determined, is that better communication and collaboration between curriculum and technology leaders can impact teaching and learning in positive ways. What's more, both sides bring expertise to the process. For example, curriculum leaders are knowledgeable about research on effective instructional strategies to improve student academic performance. Tech leaders, meanwhile, are familiar with educational technology trends and emerging applications in areas such as cloud computing, blended learning, online communities of practice and the use of mobile devices.

Together, these leaders can develop a common language that aligns evidence-based instructional practices — like those identified in *Classroom Instruction That Works* by Robert J. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering and Jane E. Pollock — with technology (consider the examples in the table at left, for instance).

Action Plan

The Consortium for School Networking has been interviewing curriculum and technology leaders around the country who share a vision for engaging, student-centered learning environments and are committed to collaborating regularly.

These leaders agree that curriculum and technology educators need to develop a trusting relationship and recommend the following:

1. Lay the groundwork by discussing why collaboration is important and agreeing to honor the decisions made together.
2. Identify and promote ways in which technology can support best educational practices and address students' diverse needs.
3. Create cross-functional teams.
4. Once a joint vision is developed, go together into the schools to see what's actually happening in their classrooms.
5. Build a supportive environment that encourages ongoing communication.
6. Collaborate with all stakeholders to create a vision for how technology will support the district's strategic goals for improved learning.
7. Build trust by being transparent about decisions and how they are made.
8. Build in time to stop and listen to each other — and share each other's calendars.
9. Agree to be flexible; it's impossible to say yes or no to everything proposed.
10. Honor genuine differences and keep focused on your common purpose.

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